

European Parliament press release on EU activities to promote human rights in the world (21 May 2006)

Caption: This press release from the European Parliament, dated 21 May 2006, outlines the actions undertaken by the European Union for the defence and the promotion of human rights in the world.

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MEPs evaluate EU actions on human rights in the world

The EU is a staunch advocate of human rights, inside and outside Europe. But does it practice what it preaches? In a resolution evaluating the annual EU report on human rights in the world in 2005, MEPs have a close look at specific EU actions in the world and find room for improvement.

The report, by Richard Howitt (PES, UK), is a reaction to the EU Council's annual report on human rights in 2005. Contrary to previous years, the current report not only remarks on the general human rights situation around the world today, but expressly evaluates the EU's actions in human rights promotion. It singles out areas where the Council's activity deserves praise. These include the UK Presidency's efforts to combat the death penalty and promote freedom of expression, and the Austrian Presidency's promise to "continue the practice of demarches in respect of all of the EU's international partners regarding the ratification of international conventions banning the use of torture."

MEPs welcome the inclusion of human rights issues in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and commend the "increasing effectiveness of EU electoral observation activities." They praise the Council for imposing sanctions on Uzbekistan last year, and reiterate their condemnation of the violent repression in Ethiopia and human rights abuses in Tunisia.

Nevertheless, the report is concerned at the "deteriorating security situation in Darfur," "continuing reports of a long list of human rights abuses" in China, the "extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture in custody in Chechnya," and "Iran's poor human rights record." There is also anxiety about human rights abuses in Iraq, but a welcome for EU support for the new government there. The Parliament asks Council and Commission to "call upon the US government immediately to close the Guantanamo detention centre" and give the prisoners held there a fair trial.

The report warns that "there is a general failure by the European Union to systematically and continuously address human rights concerns" and that "EU activities in the UN with respect to human rights are too introverted." MEPs want to see a much more significant proportion of European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights funding devoted to grass-roots projects. They want a "clear system of sanctions" to be applied to countries that violate the human rights clause in agreements with the Union. In addition, the Parliament is "concerned that countries with a poor human rights record have been elected as members of the UN Human Rights Council".

In future annual reports, MEPs want to see a list of "Countries of Particular Concern" according to the EU's Human Rights Guidelines. They call for the reports to "address explicitly discrimination issues" based on ethnicity, religion, gender, disability and sexual orientation. Finally, Parliament wishes to be more directly involved in the drafting of the annual reports, but wants to "continue to issue its own report in order to assess the EU's human rights policy and to exercise parliamentary control."